

April 30, 2017

no-bill deputies

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By Matt Hollis Special to The Herald

Two Fort Bend County sheriff deputies accused of official oppression for trying to take a boat from a Chambers County man have been no billed by a grand jury.

Fort Bend Deputies Gregory Goode and Marcelo Garcia were placed on administrative leave after Rick Powell of Beach City said that the duo had come to his property to retrieve a boat illegally late last year.

The deputies were dressed in their uniforms with badges and firearms. Powell claimed they took his 36-foot offshore boat as collateral after the boat's previous owner failed to repay a personal loan from Goode.

“What the investigation showed was that they didn't follow procedures right, but they had a right to repossess the boat,” said Chambers County Sheriff Brian Hawthorne. “We took it to the grand jury as official oppression, which means that they were going to take it whether anyone likes it or not. But the grand jury disagreed.”

Hawthorne said the grand jury came to the conclusion that the deputies took the boat while off-duty, they were not using a sheriff's vehicle and didn't do it under the authority of the sheriff.

The term “no billed” indicates the grand jury found insufficient evidence to support a criminal prosecution.

Powell found out about the grand jury's decision through the press and that no one from Chambers County or Fort Bend County ever contacted him.

“How in the hell can they say that when they came here in uniforms and with guns,” Powell said. “It doesn't make any sense. Something has to be done with cops going around and getting away with things like this. It is ridiculous.”

Powell had said when the deputies showed up at this home to take the boat, they at first said they had a lien on the boat. After Powell said he

explained that he had the boat's registration, the deputies then said the lien was on the boat's motor. Then, Powell said while he was inside gathering paperwork, the deputies towed the boat away. The boat was reported as stolen and later, Baytown Police stopped the deputies, but not as a normal police traffic stop.

Goode admitted during questioning that the boat was collateral for a \$5,500 loan he gave to the boat's former owner, who then listed the boat on Craigslist website, where Powell eventually saw and purchased it. The boat was returned to Powell.

Powell said that he was sent an official paper about the boat the day after the deputies showed up to retrieve it.

“But they still had no right to come on my property, come through a locked gate and repossess something,” Powell said. “There are rules they have to follow and they cannot do it their own way.”

Hawthorne said he was upset himself with the way the Fort Bend County deputies went about this.

“I am still angry about this,” Hawthorne said. “I still believe it was improperly done. But we took the best case we had to the grand jury and they no billed it.”

According to Bob Haenel, Fort Bend County public information officer, Goode received three days off without pay and Garcia received a reprimand.

There has been no indication from either Goode or Garcia if they intend to make another attempt to retrieve the boat again from Powell.

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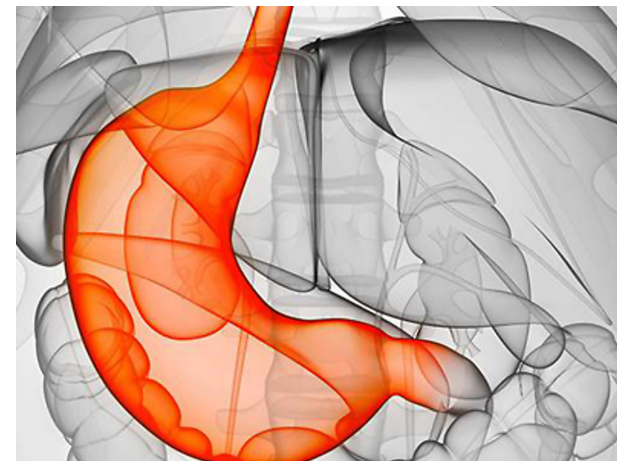
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